

Experience Life in Victorian Times

Hall Place in Victorian Times

During the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) Hall Place was let to tenants as a private home. In the late 17th Century, the house became a boarding school for boys and it remained so for most of the Victorian era. We know some things about life at Hall Place during its time from surviving historical documents. For example:

In 1839 it was home to 80 boys, the headmaster and his family, 5 teachers and several servants. The headmaster was a gentleman called John James Barton who regularly sent school reports to parents.

The hours were long for the pupils, staff and servants with some seasonal variation. In the summer months the boys were woken at 6.00am. However, by 6.15 everyone would be gathered in the large schoolroom (presumably the Great Hall) ready to listen to scripture followed by prayers.

The Victorians considered cleanliness to be a virtue and so the boys were given ten minutes for washing. Should the boys be found to be unclean they were fined accordingly!

At 11.00am the boys were all given a break outside for a quarter of an hour and whilst they exercised, windows and doors were opened to refresh the classrooms.

The lessons which all pupils received on a weekly basis were - English grammar and composition, Greek or German, Latin, French, mathematics or arithmetic, globes, geography and maps, orthography (grammar and spelling) and writing, readings in history and poetry, lessons on objects and scriptures. Additional studies of music, drawing and singing were also provided.

The boys were given Wednesdays and Saturdays off, however, they were expected to devote time to subjects such as chemistry, dancing, drill (P.E.), elocution (speaking properly) and music.

In October 1849, John Barton decided to relocate the school to Brighton and placed the contents of the house with the auctioneer Mr J. Callow. The auction catalogue lists all the furniture including 'a grand pianoforte, brewing utensils, a stack of meadow hay, a pony, two fat hogs and a cow!'

After the school moved out, Maitland Dashwood (the owner of Hall Place) set about making alterations and renovations. Once complete it was re-let as a private house to several rich tenants including Emile d'Erlanger who was a founder member of the Channel Tunnel Scheme.

Home Life in Victorian Britain (Washday)

Topics covered What were homes like a long time ago?
 What was it like for children living in Victorian Britain?

Life in the Victorian period was very different to modern times. This session aims to help children understand these differences. You will be met by a member of staff dressed as a Victorian maid or we will dress one of the adults in your group.

Hall Place is a large house and would have had many servants. Each servant had a different job. Giving every child in the class a servant's job is a great way to start a discussion about how different lives were in Victorian times. This discussion will also include objects from our handling collection and archive photographs. From the butler and housekeeper to the scullery maid and stable lad, we will look at who gets to empty the smelly chamber pots, who pours the expensive tea, who carries the lady's shopping and who scrubs the dirty washing.

Today we use a washing machine to do all the laundry, but in Victorian times washing was done by hand, taking an entire day and lots of equipment. The whole class will experience just how much hard work it really was by getting their own hands wet and soapy. They will be shown how to use a washboard, tin barrel, washday dolly and mangle.

Children will be sat at four tables, each with a collection of objects. These objects were all used in Victorian times to do the housework.

Whilst small groups of children are tasked with the washing, the rest of the class will need to complete the student's on-site activity sheet which links to the objects. You will find this sheet on the Hall Place education resources webpage, and will need to print off one for each child in your class. <http://www.bexleyheritagetrust.org.uk/hallplace/school-visits/education-resources/>